

Iowa's 2012 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey

The number of eagles counted in the 2012 Midwinter Survey was roughly the same as numbers from 2011 (fig. 1). A total of 3232 Bald Eagles were counted in 2012, compared to 2011's 3674 eagles counted. 2012's total remained higher than the previous 10 year average of 2991. Fifty-three routes were completed in 45 counties, covering 1804 miles of habitat.

The dates for this year's survey were January 4 to January 18, with target dates of January 13 and 14. All but 3 of the 56 active routes were run and all but 1 of the completed surveys was done during the survey period. Twenty of the 53 surveys were run on the target dates with another big group (14 routes) being run on January 4th; the date of the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey. The weather this winter has been much milder than normal and as a result the average temperature during the survey was higher and the percent ice lower than in 2011.

Eagles returned to the Mississippi River this winter which once again held the highest number of birds (1196) followed closely by the Des Moines (1177). The last 2 years there have been more eagles counted on the Des Moines but the Mississippi traditionally has the highest counts. Otherwise the distribution of eagles differed somewhat from previous years most notable with the Missouri River producing the highest count since the Midwinter survey started in 1991 with 195 birds recorded. The average for the previous 21 years on the Missouri is 32.76.

In contrast to high numbers on the Eagle survey, the number of birds counted on the Midwinter Waterfowl Survey, which is run in a similar fashion, on overlapping dates and in similar habitat as the bald eagle survey, was lower in 2012. A total of 1034 eagles (573 adults, 460 immatures) were counted; roughly 1800 fewer birds than counted in 2011. A total of 348 (157 adults, 190 immatures, 1 unknown) of these birds were counted in 54 counties where no standardized bald eagle survey route exists making it unlikely that these are double counted birds.

The percent of immature eagles in the count stayed roughly stable with last year's count at around 33% (fig. 2). The amount of immature eagles typically fluctuates and is somewhat tied to weather patterns and this year is close to the 10-year average of 35.1%. Warmer temperatures and more open water likely contribute to a higher number of immature eagles staying in Iowa. The average temperature during the 2012 survey was up again to 26 degrees fahrenheit the average ice cover was very low at 38.4% (compared to 65.4% in 2011).

The expectation is that warmer winters result in a lower winter count of eagles because the birds are less concentrated and therefore harder to detect. This year's count was an obvious exception to that as the weather during the count was some of the mildest and yet the eagle count remained high. Some of this may be related to a larger number of eagles returning to the Mississippi River which has had lower counts the last two years. Counts along the Des Moines River were down but remained high. Another unique feature to this count was the high number of eagles on the Missouri River. This suggests that eagles were more evenly distributed across the state's waterways and despite this wide distribution, detection of eagles was good. While counts have become much more highly variable in recent years the overall trend since 1991 still displays an upward trajectory. Bald eagles continue to utilize many of the state's waterways and are providing many Iowans with opportunities to see and appreciate these majestic birds.

Fig. 1 Number of Bald Eagles Seen During Iowa Mid-Winter Survey 1993-Present

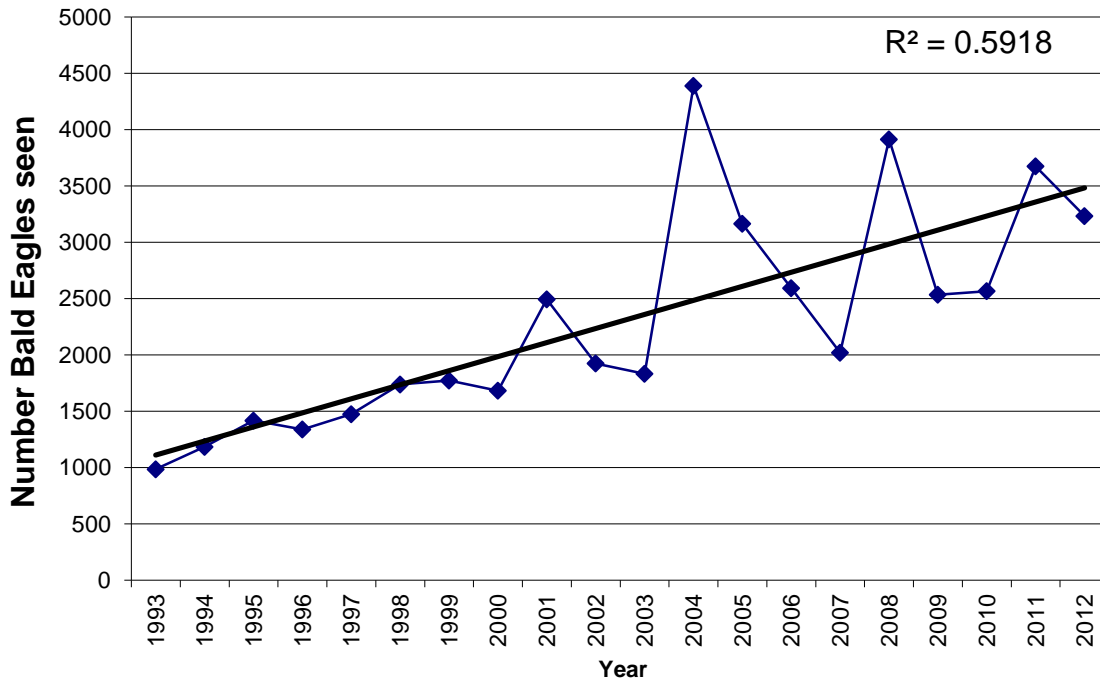
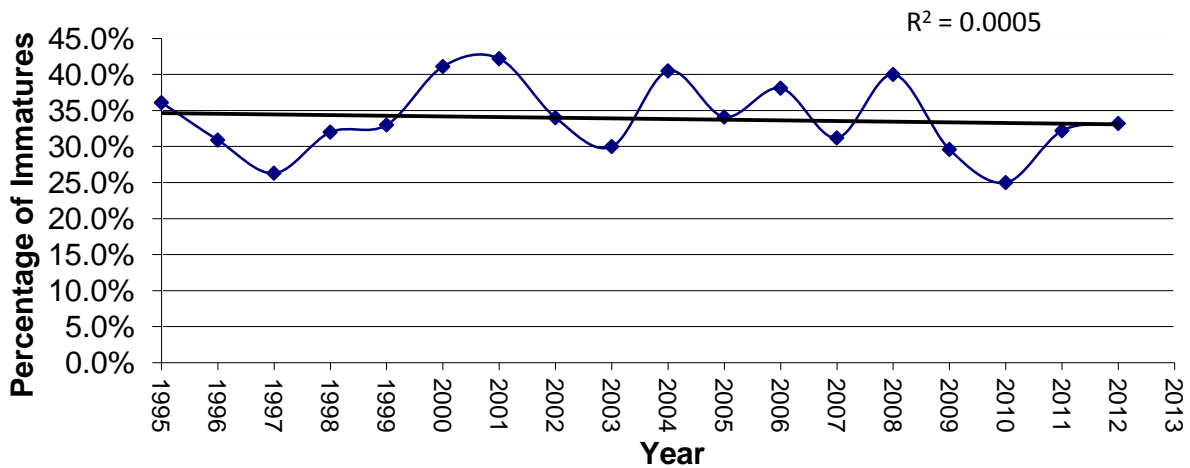


Fig. 2 Percent Immature Bald Eagles in Iowa Bald Eagle Midwinter Survey, 1995-present



2012 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey Results for Iowa										
Water Body*	% of Total BE	Total BE	Adult BE	Imm BE	Unk Age BE	Total GE	Adu lt GE	Imm GE	Unk Age GE	Un-ID Eagle
State Total	100%	3232	1952	1072	208	0	0	0	0	0
Mississippi River	37%	1196	690	404	102	0	0	0	0	0
Des Moines River	36.4%	1177	730	371	76	0	0	0	0	0
Missouri River	6%	195	91	93	11	0	0	0	0	0
Skunk River	4.7%	152	94	52	6	0	0	0	0	0
Maquoketa	3.5%	114	86	28	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iowa River	2.8%	92	62	28	2	0	0	0	0	0
Wapsipinicon River	2.5%	80	59	14	7	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	2.1%	67	47	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Little Sioux River	1.1%	37	13	24	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lake Rathbun	1.1%	34	19	15	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cedar River	0.9%	31	24	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Turkey River	0.7%	23	19	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
S. Maquoketa River	0.5%	16	8	4	4	0	0	0	0	0
Chariton River	0.5%	16	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nodaway River	0.06%	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
						0	0	0	0	0
Age Composition		100%	60.4%	33.2%	6.4%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Counties Surveyed	45	Comparative Weather Conditions: <								